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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The phenomenology of protest atmosphere: A demonstrator perspective

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## Abstract

This paper aims to improve our understanding of demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions, that is, demonstrators' affective state, which is induced by the protest environment. We examined how demonstrators perceive protest atmosphere, why they do so, and whether atmosphere perceptions influence demonstrators' future collective action preparedness. We hypothesized that demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions diverge on a dimension of pleasure, and relate to their grievance (i.e., perceived societal intolerance), group identification, empowerment, and perceived police aggression. A pleasant atmosphere perception was expected to stimulate a demonstrator's future action preparedness. We tested these hypotheses with a mixed-methods dataset of two Dutch protests, staged by Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgenders and anti-monarchists. Our analyses revealed that demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions diverge on a dimension of pleasure, and relate to group identification, empowerment, and, for anti-monarchists, perceived societal intolerance. A pleasant atmosphere perception deters a demonstrator's future action preparedness and also stimulates his or her group identification and empowerment, which, then, stimulate his or her action preparedness.

One of the premises of social psychology is that people live in a perceived environment. Colloquially, people often use the word 'atmosphere' (or synonyms such as 'mood' or 'climate') to describe 'a feeling that a place has of being pleasant and interesting or exciting' ('Atmosphere', n.d.). Scholars have sought to understand and explain people's atmosphere perceptions in all sorts of environments, such as people's homes (Pennartz, 1986), prisons (Ruiz, 2007), the office (Bierhoff & Müller, 2005), malls (e.g., Wakefield & Baker, 1998), flea markets (Sherry, 1990), restaurants (Wilson, 2003), and sport stadiums (Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2010). However, to the best of our knowledge, no research has been conducted on the perceived atmosphere of protest events (but see van Leeuwen, Klandermans, & van Stekelenburg, 2015).

A quick glimpse at newspaper coverage of protest events shows that people from around the world refer to protest atmosphere. For instance, a reporter for the *Economist* wrote on 4 April 2014: 'Environmental protest in China: volatile atmosphere'. Also other

protest actors perceive atmosphere. For instance, the Dutch police forces thought that an Occupy protest staged in Amsterdam on 15 October 2011 was characterized by a 'good atmosphere' ('Goede sfeer', 2011). One of the organizers of an anti-fracking demonstration staged in Manchester on 9 March 2014 said it was a 'party atmosphere' ('Party atmosphere', 2014). The further description of these events provides some explanation of why these atmospheres were perceived as such. For instance, at the environmental protest in China (in Maoming, Guangdong Province), the police dispersed the protesting crowd with tear gas and batons, which allegedly led to at least several injuries ('Environmental Protest', 2014). The organizers of the British anti-fracking demonstration explained: 'We certainly saw more people out than we have before and it gave us a great chance to talk to people along the way' ('Party atmosphere', 2014). Although these descriptions are informative, they by no means provide us with a systematic understanding of how protest atmosphere is perceived, and why.

This paper constitutes a first attempt to understand perceived protest atmosphere. We gather that atmosphere is in the eye of the beholder. Therefore, we studied individuals' atmosphere perceptions, rather than the protest atmosphere. We focused on demonstrators, rather than other protest actors, such as police officers or media reporters. This is because demonstrators constitute the most important group: They are the ones who stage the event and usually outnumber all other groups present. Besides, these different groups may well perceive the atmosphere differently. For instance, while demonstrators may perceive a party atmosphere, the police might consider the crowd threatening (Reicher *et al.*, 2007).

We studied how demonstrators perceive protest atmosphere, why they do so, and whether perceived atmosphere influences demonstrators' willingness to participate in future collective action. For our study, we employed a dataset of two Dutch protest events, which were staged by Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgenders (LGBT's) and anti-monarchists. These events were selected as our consultation with the police made us expect them to differ substantially in atmosphere and, thus, demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions. During these events, 352 demonstrators completed a paper-and-pencil questionnaire, in which they, *inter alia*, reported and explained their atmosphere perceptions in their own words, and indicated their future action preparedness. To triangulate these findings, we also asked other protest actors to assess the atmosphere: Researchers made field observations, organizers and police officers were interviewed, and media reports were gathered.

The added value of this study is twofold. First, the concept 'perceived protest atmosphere' sheds light on the affective side of protest participation, which is still understudied. Second, atmosphere perceptions appear to influence demonstrators' willingness to participate in future collective action, over and above the variables that are known to have an effect, such as grievances, group identification, and empowerment.

## PERCEIVED PROTEST ATMOSPHERE

In this paper, we conceptualize 'perceived protest atmosphere' as the affective state that the protest environment induces<sup>1</sup>. This conceptualization flows from Mehrabian and Russell's (1974, p. 8) 'framework for studying [...] environmental psychology', which is a field that studies the interrelationship between environments and human affect, cognition, and behaviour (Gifford, 2007). According to this framework, individuals evaluate their environment with their senses: sight, sound, scent, and touch. Such an evaluation, which also depends on an

individuals' personality, directly elicits an affective response (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974, pp. 1-9). In everyday speech, such affect is referred to as 'atmosphere' (Uhrich & Koenigstorfer, 2009, pp. 327-328).

Individuals' atmosphere perceptions have been found to diverge on a dimension of pleasure-displeasure, which is 'a feeling state [...] with behavioural indicators such as smiles, laughter, and, in general, positive versus negative facial expressions' (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974, p. 18). In turn, pleasure-displeasure engenders either approach or avoidance behaviour: The 'physical movement toward, or away from, an environment or stimulus, degree of attention, exploration, favorable attitudes [...], approach to a task [...], and approach to another person [...]' (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974, pp. 8, 96).<sup>1</sup>

## PROTEST PARTICIPATION

As mentioned, we are unaware of any systematic research on perceived protest atmosphere. In fact, research on the affective side of protest participation is rare. Although Le Bon (1985) already noted that (protesting) crowds are full of affect, only a few researchers sought to understand what this affect is, why it is experienced, and how it influences future collective action participation (e.g., Drury, Cocking, Beale, Hanson, & Rapley, 2005; Neville & Reicher, 2011). Before we present our hypotheses of how demonstrators perceive protest atmosphere, why they do so, and how perceived protest atmosphere influences demonstrators' future action preparedness, we first delineate research on protest participation. As participation is considered to be part of 'a virtuous cycle of action and motivation' (Louis, 2009, p. 730; also see Tausch & Becker, 2013), we report pre-, during- and post-protest variables. Not surprisingly, these variables largely overlap.

<sup>1</sup>In 1974, Mehrabian and Russell proposed two more affective dimensions, being arousal-sleepiness ('a feeling state [...] ranging from sleep to frantic excitement') and dominance-submissiveness ('the inverse of the judged potency of the environment'; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974, pp. 18-19). The latter dimension was, however, excluded from the framework when subsequent research revealed that dominance-submissiveness is a cognitive appraisal rather than an affect (Russell & Pratt, 1980, p. 313). The first dimension remained (Russell, 1980; Russell & Pratt, 1980). However, some studies indicated that arousal-sleepiness does not significantly influence approach-avoidance behaviour but only moderates the (strong) effect of pleasure-displeasure on such behaviour (e.g., Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). For this reason, we did not take the arousal-sleepiness dimension into account.

## Protest Mobilization

A protest event is a particular form of collective action, defined as ‘any temporary occupation by a number of people of an open place, public or private, which directly or indirectly includes the expression of political opinions’ (Fillieule, 1997, p. 44). Individuals who participate in protest are generally aggrieved ‘about the way authorities [or other power holders] are treating a social problem’ (Klandermans, 1997, p. 38; also see van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). For example, individuals may think they are unjustly disadvantaged or feel their principles have been violated (Klandermans, 1997). Although grievances are considered ‘the linchpin’ of collective action (Jasper, 1997, p. 113), they are not enough to explain protest participation. People must also identify with a collective, expect the protest to be efficacious, and feel angry (van Stekelenburg, Klandermans, & van Dijk, 2011).<sup>2</sup>

*Group identification* is an individual’s self-categorization as a group member (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which links his or her social identity to the group’s collective identity. Social identity is ‘that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value or emotional significance attached to that membership’ (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). Collective identity is ‘the shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests and solidarity’ (Taylor & Whittier, 1995, p. 172). So, social identity is an individual’s idiosyncratic remake of a group’s collective identity. The stronger an individual identifies with the group, the more he or she incorporates the group’s collective identity into his or her social identity (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2010). Several studies revealed that for protest (and other forms of collective action) to take place, some group identification is needed (de Weerd & Klandermans, 1999; Simon et al., 1998). This finding is also confirmed by a meta-analysis (van Zomeren et al., 2008). According to Wright (2001, p. 413), this is ‘simply obvious’, given that ‘in order to engage in collective action the individual must recognize his or her membership in the relevant collective’.

*Efficacy* is ‘an individuals’ expectation that it is possible to alter conditions or policies through protest’ (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013, p. 889, referring to Gamson, 1992, p. 7). Various studies showed that a sense of efficacy is needed for people to take

the streets (Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). Again, a meta-analysis corroborated this finding (van Zomeren et al., 2008).

*Anger* is an ‘intense and short-term feeling of displeasure, hostility or antagonism toward someone or something, [which is] typically combined with an urge to attack or change another persons’ behaviour’ (Miron-Spektor & Rafaeli, 2009, p. 153). This negative affect is considered a powerful catalyst of protest participation (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013), especially when it is experienced on behalf of the group one identifies with (Smith, 1993; also see van Zomeren et al., 2004).

## Protest Experiences

Contrary to what one might expect, given that individuals are mobilized for action by, inter alia, grievances and anger, protest participation generally induces positive affect (e.g., pride, joy, and/or pleasure). Although research on the topic is scarce, this finding is strikingly consistent (Britt & Heise, 2000; Collins, 2001; Drury & Reicher, 2005, 2009; Drury et al., 2005; Jasper, 1997; Neville & Reicher, 2011; Novelli, Drury, Reicher, & Stott, 2013; Wood, 2001). In line with this finding, as well as Mehrabian and Russell’s (1974) theorizing on environmental psychology, we hypothesized that demonstrators’ atmosphere perceptions diverge on a dimension of pleasure (**H1**).

Scholars devote ‘the pleasures of protest [participation]’ (Jasper, 1997, p. 217) to group identification, empowerment, and the police conduct (e.g., Britt & Heise, 2000; Drury et al., 2005; Neville & Reicher, 2011). Before we elaborate on these protest characteristics, we devote a few words to protest issues, which are also known to elicit affect.

Protest issues, that is to say, demonstrators’ grievances, generally elicit negative affect, such as anger (Jasper, 1997; van Stekelenburg et al., 2011; van Zomeren et al., 2004). However, during protests, demonstrators’ awareness of their shared grievances has been found to elicit positive affect, as this engenders a sense of group identification and empowerment. For instance, Britt and Heise (2000) found that ‘the [...] feeling of anger propels stigmatized individuals [e.g., LGBT’s] into public space to behave collectively’ (p. 257), whereas ‘the collective public display of their stigma develops empathetic solidarity and pride’ (p. 266). Similarly, Wood (2001) found that Salvadoran peasants who between the 1970s and 1990s opposed the long-standing patterns of political and economic exclusion in their country, experienced ‘pride—and indeed, pleasure—in their exercise of agency in the realization of their interests’ (p. 268).

<sup>2</sup>According to van Stekelenburg et al. (2011), protest participation is also stimulated by demonstrators’ ideology (i.e., when people’s ‘values have been violated and they want to air their indignation’; p. 93). We do not discuss this motive, as we consider it irrelevant for our argument.

Based on these findings, we expected that a demonstrator's grievance relates positively to his or her pleasant atmosphere perception. For our studies, we focused on a grievance that is relevant for the minority groups that we study, being perceived societal intolerance. This grievance concerns a demonstrator's appraisal that he or she is not accepted by society (e.g., van Doorn, 2014). So, specifically, we hypothesized that a demonstrator's perception of a pleasant protest atmosphere relates positively to his or her perception of societal intolerance (**H1**).

As mentioned, group identification and empowerment generally induce positive affect (Britt & Heise, 2000; Drury & Reicher, 2005; Drury et al., 2005; Jasper, 1997; Neville & Reicher, 2011; Novelli et al., 2013; Wood, 2001). The two variables are prerequisites of collective action (empowerment is then referred to as 'efficacy').<sup>3</sup> However, group identification and empowerment may also be engendered by collective action (Drury et al., 2005; Klandermans, Sabucedo, Rodriguez, & de Weerd, 2002). As previously reported, this process may be stimulated by demonstrators' awareness of their shared grievances. Yet, also particular protest characteristics, such as the police conduct, are known to play a role.

The elaborated social identity model of crowd behaviour explains the latter process (Drury & Reicher, 2005; Drury et al., 2005; Reicher, 1996). When demonstrators consider the police behaviour as illegitimate (e.g., forcefully removing peaceful protesters) and indiscriminate, they will identify more strongly with each other out of a feeling of common fate. The adoption of a more inclusive in-group identification, which is accompanied by feelings of consensus and expectations of mutual in-group support, empowers demonstrators to oppose the police (Drury et al., 2005). Such empowerment is particularly strong when demonstrators feel they can enact their social identity over and against the power of the police (or other dominant out-groups)—a process called 'collective self-objectification' (Drury et al., 2005).

So, given that group identification and empowerment are key to demonstrators' protest participation and are known to engender positive affect, we assumed that a demonstrator's perception of a pleasant protest atmosphere relates positively to his or her group identification (**H1**) and empowerment (**H1**).

As indicated, perceived police aggression stimulates demonstrators' sense of group identification and empowerment. However, this perception also elicits negative affect (e.g., fear and/or anger; Drury et al., 2005).

This is because perceived police aggression—the perception that the authorities try to increase the cost of collective action (Tilly, 1995)—is generally considered an injustice (Drury & Reicher, 2005; Reicher, 1996). After all, in Western democracies, protesting is a constitutional right. In the words of a participant of the student protest in London in 1988, the so-called Battle of Westminster:

We have got a right to air our views. I think the police probably is necessary to a certain degree, [...] but I think that such [...] a sort of overbearing presence, you know, on horses, and looking as if they're gonna charge all the time is [...] unnecessary and it just aggravates the situation (Reicher, 1996, p. 123).

So, based on these findings, we hypothesized that a demonstrator's perception of a pleasant protest atmosphere relates negatively to his or her perception of police aggression (**H1**).

### Future Action Participation

Scholars have paid little attention to how demonstrators' protest experiences shape their willingness to engage in future collective action (Klandermans, 1997; Louis, 2009). However, a few studies indicated that positive protest experiences stimulate demonstrators' future protest participation. For instance, Wood (2001) found that for Salvadoran peasants, pride and pleasure, amongst others, promoted their sustained participation and even motivated others to join the movement. Similarly, Collins (2001) argued that the more protests engender 'collective emotional energy' (p. 30), which makes demonstrators feel 'pumped up with enthusiasm and confidence' (p. 28), the more they turn into 'commitment-generating occasions' (p. 30; also see Jasper, 2014). Based on these findings, as well as Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) framework, we expected that a demonstrator's perception of a pleasant protest atmosphere stimulates his or her future action preparedness (**H6**).

Grievances, group identification, empowerment, and perceived police aggression have also been found to influence demonstrators' (intended) future action participation. As mentioned, the first three variables mobilize demonstrators for action (e.g., Drury et al., 2005; Klandermans et al., 2002; Wood, 2001). Perceived police aggression, however, relates negatively to future action participation (Drury et al., 2005). These findings suggest that the four variables should be taken into account when we study the effect of demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions on their future action preparedness.

<sup>3</sup>For a discussion on the distinction between empowerment and efficacy, see Drury et al. (2005).



A grievance, such as perceived societal intolerance, precedes collective action. For this reason, we gathered that the variable would obscure the causal relationship between demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions and their future action preparedness (MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000). In statistical terms, we expected that perceived societal intolerance confounds the effect of perceived protest atmosphere on future action preparedness (H7a).

Group identification and empowerment do not only precede collective action but may also be stimulated by it. Therefore, we expected the variables to be part of the causal relationship between demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions and their future action preparedness (MacKinnon et al., 2000). Specifically, we thought that perceived protest atmosphere would influence group identification and empowerment, which, in turn, would influence future action preparedness. Statistically put, both group identification and empowerment were expected to mediate the effect of perceived protest atmosphere on future action preparedness (H7b,c).

Demonstrators' perceptions of police aggression take place at the event. So, also this variable was expected to be part of the causal relationship between demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions and their future action preparedness (MacKinnon et al., 2000). Specifically, we expected perceived protest atmosphere to influence perceived police aggression, which, in turn, would influence future action preparedness. In statistical terms, we hypothesized that perceived police aggression mediates the effect of perceived protest atmosphere on future action preparedness (H7d).

### In Sum: Research Questions and Hypotheses

We studied how demonstrators perceive protest atmosphere, why they do so, and whether atmosphere perceptions influence demonstrators' future action preparedness. Based on Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) framework on environmental psychology, and research on protest participation, we hypothesized that demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions diverge on a dimension of pleasure (H1). A demonstrator's pleasant atmosphere perception was expected to relate positively to his or her grievance (i.e., perceived societal intolerance; H2), group identification (H3), and empowerment (H4) and negatively to his or her perception of police aggression (H5). In turn, a pleasant atmosphere perception was assumed to stimulate a demonstrator's future collective action preparedness (H6). However, this effect was expected to be confounded by perceived societal intolerance (H7a) and mediated by group identification (H7b), empowerment (H7c), and perceived police aggression (H7d).

## TWO PROTEST EVENTS

For this research, we studied two protest events: an 'LGBT demonstration' and an 'anti-monarchy demonstration'. These events were selected because our consultation with the police made us expect them to differ substantially in atmosphere, and, thus, demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions.

The *LGBT demonstration* was staged by the Dutch Association for Integration of Homosexuality (COC) to oppose the Russian 'anti-gay propaganda bill'. This bill, if accepted by Russian Parliament, would prohibit LGBT's to publically show their sexual orientation, organize themselves, or protest for their rights. The rally took place on 8 April 2013, which is when Russian President Vladimir Putin made a state visit to the Netherlands. To make sure Putin was reached, the protesters assembled in the early evening on the Amsterdam 'Oosterdok', a square just across from the National Maritime Museum where Putin was attending a banquet. The organizers and police estimated that the event drew 4250 participants. To manage the event, the organizers deployed a team of safety stewards. In addition, the police dispatched a platoon of riot police and 24 so-called dialogue police officers. While the riot police sought to guard the entrance of the National Maritime Museum, the dialogue police proactively approached demonstrators on the Oosterdok to foster a good relationship with them. To stimulate these interactions, dialogue police officers wore yellow safety vests over their 'normal' uniforms. Also, half of these officers were members of 'pink in blue', a police network that advocates the interests of LGBT's ('Roze in blauw', n.d.). No arrests were made.

The *anti-monarchy demonstration* was staged by a platform of three small organisations—the New Republican Society, ProRepublica, and 'It is 2013!'—on 30 April 2013. On this day, which coincided with the Dutch national holiday called 'Queen's day',<sup>4</sup> Queen Beatrix abdicated and her son, Prince Willem-Alexander, was inaugurated as the new King of the Netherlands. To make sure the royal family was reached, the organizers wished to protest on the Dam Square in downtown Amsterdam. This is because the abdication and coronation ceremonies would take place in the Royal Palace and The New Church, which are both located here.

<sup>4</sup>Queen's day was celebrated during the reign of Queen Juliana (1948–1980) and Queen Beatrix (1980–2013) on 30 April, which was Queen Juliana's birthday. Since 2014, the holiday is called 'King's day' and is celebrated on 27 April, which is King Willem-Alexander's birthday.

The municipality, however, did not allow this. From the six protest localities that the municipality appointed for the rally, the organizers chose the 'Waterloo Square', which is located 1.1 km from the Dam Square. The event took place during the entire afternoon and attracted about 200 participants. Most of them, however, only stayed briefly. To manage the event, the police deployed eight dialogue police officers and kept a platoon of riot police on standby. No arrests were made at the event. However, the leaders of two of the involved organizations had been arrested before the event while they were individually protesting in front of the palace, something the municipality said they would condone.

## METHOD

For this study, we employed a mixed-methods dataset of the two mentioned protests, containing paper-and-pencil questionnaires, field observations, interviews with key actors, and media reports.

### Paper-and-Pencil Questionnaire

During both events, demonstrators completed a short paper-and-pencil questionnaire: 164 at the LGBT demonstration and 188 at the anti-monarchy demonstration. Before we report the qualitative and quantitative measures it contained, we devote a few words to our sampling strategy.

### Sampling Demonstrators

At both events, we sought to gather a random sample of protesters. Given that the events differed in (estimated) size, we sampled them in a different way. At the LGBT demonstration, which attracted about 4250 participants, we used the sampling strategy of the research project 'Caught in the act of protest: Contextualizing Contestation' (CCC). This meant that researchers were spread over the protest area and used a count ratio to select respondents (van Stekelenburg, Walgrave, Klandermans, & Verhulst, 2012; also see Klandermans *et al.*, 2011). As the anti-monarchy demonstration only attracted about 200 participants, we approached the whole population of demonstrators. At both events, nearly all demonstrators that were asked to complete the questionnaire agreed to do so, although this meant that they had to cease their activities for about 5 minutes.

## Qualitative Measures

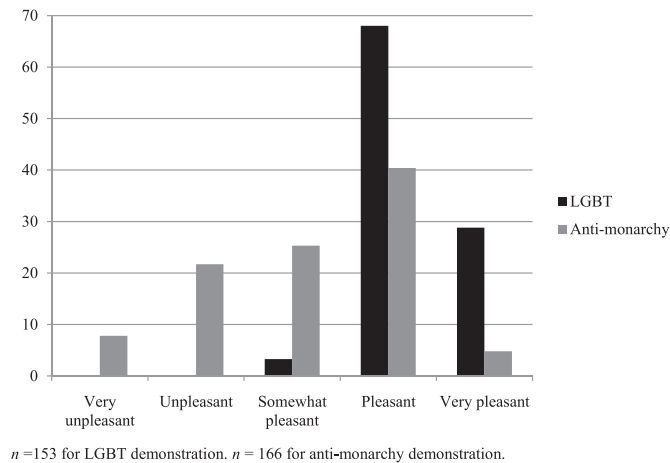
To study *how demonstrators perceive protest atmosphere*, we posed the question: 'How do you perceive the atmosphere at this demonstration?'<sup>5</sup> Answers ranged from one to a few words. Data are missing for 7% of the LGBT sample and 13% of the anti-monarchy sample.

To understand these atmosphere verbalizations, we performed a 'thematic analysis', which is 'a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns of meaning (themes) within data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This procedure existed of two steps. First, we coded the data inductively. In other words, we sought to interpret the atmosphere verbalizations without considering the environmental psychology framework by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). This assessment revealed that many protesters literally described the atmosphere as 'pleasant' or used synonyms such as 'good', 'positive', 'fine', or 'great'. So, these findings suggested that perceived protest atmosphere diverges on a dimension of pleasure.

A subsequent deductive analysis of demonstrators' atmosphere verbalizations based on Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) framework corroborated this finding. That is to say, quite a few of the verbalizations coincided with the 'affect words on pleasure-displeasure' (Russell, 1980, p. 1169) that had been identified by Mehrabian and Russell (1974, also see Russell, 1980; Russell & Pratt, 1980), such as 'happy', 'relaxed', or 'bored'. Other answers seemed to be synonyms of these words (e.g., 'cheerful' for 'happy', and 'chill' for 'relaxed'). Only a few answers did not (directly) refer to (dis)pleasure but to the characteristics of the concerning protest or its participants (e.g., 'small' or 'Gay!'). Based on these findings, we concluded that demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions diverge on a dimension of pleasure.

To be able to compare demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions within and between the two demonstrations, we created an atmosphere scale ranging from (1) *very unpleasant* to (5) *very pleasant* (Figure 1). All atmosphere verbalizations were placed on this scale, based on our interpretation of their meaning. Our codes for the answers that clearly referred to a sense of pleasure largely coincided with the coding choices of Russell (1980, p. 1169) and Russell and Pratt (1980, p. 312). For instance, 'pathetic' was coded as 'very unpleasant', and 'boring' was coded as 'unpleasant'; 'good' was coded as 'pleasant', and 'great' was coded as 'very pleasant'. Atmosphere verbalizations that were slightly positive (e.g., 'quite alright') or

<sup>5</sup>The survey questions and subsequent quotes from questionnaire respondents and interviewees were translated from Dutch to English by the first author.



**Fig. 1:** LGBT's and anti-monarchists' atmosphere perceptions (in %)

revealed a mixed evaluation (e.g., 'relaxed, but quiet') were coded as 'somewhat pleasant'.

To code the atmosphere verbalizations that described the protest or other protesters (e.g., 'small'), we compared them with the respondents' subsequent explanations of their atmosphere perceptions (see next paragraph), to other data on the events, and to theoretical insights on the matter. For instance, the respondent who described the atmosphere as 'small' explained that he 'had expected more people'. This respondent participated in the anti-monarchy demonstration, which drew far less participants than the organizers predicted (see Results section). As we know from past research that a low turnout is disempowering (Drury et al., 2005), we coded 'small' as 'unpleasant'.

After the atmosphere verbalizations were placed on our pleasure scale, we performed an inter-coder reliability test. This meant that all answers were also coded by a second researcher. This person was informed of the meaning of the atmosphere scale but did not know of our coding choices. A comparison of the codes revealed an inter-coder reliability of 92%. Besides, the answers that had been coded differently only diverged one point on the 5-point scale. A third coder determined the final codes of these answers. With this procedure, and the high inter-coder reliability, we think demonstrators' atmosphere verbalizations have been reliably attributed to our atmosphere scale.

To understand *why demonstrators perceive a particular atmosphere*, they were subsequently asked 'What makes you perceive the atmosphere in this way?' Answers to this question ranged from one word to a short sentence. Missing cases represent 12% of the LGBT sample and 17% of the anti-monarchy sample and largely coincide with the previous atmosphere question.

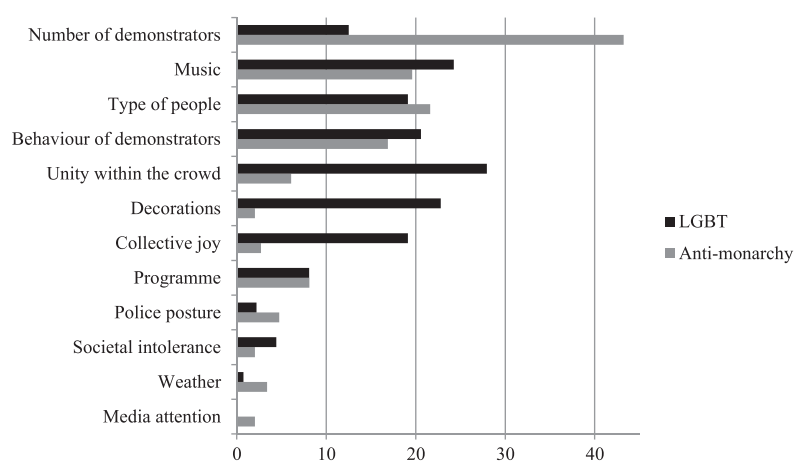
These answers were also analysed with a thematic approach. Practically, this meant that we first coded all answers inductively and at a semantic level. That is to say, the first codes we gave were rather explicit and were phrased similarly to the answers. For example, 'all the people that sympathize so much' was coded as 'sympathy', and 'unity' was coded as 'unity within the crowd'. Answers that contained multiple meanings, being the case for 49% of the LGBT sample and 32% of the anti-monarchy sample, were given multiple codes. For instance, the answer 'few people, nice music' was given the two codes: 'number of demonstrators' and 'music'. After all answers were coded, we repeatedly checked the codes against each other to make sure they matched well with the answers and had been attributed consistently. This led to the merging and splitting of several codes. Eventually, 12 codes were identified (Figure 2).

A subsequent deductive analysis, which was based on research on protest participation, revealed that most of these codes (type of people, unity within the crowd, programme, music, decorations, behaviour of other demonstrators, and collective joy) refer to group identification. Also, we concluded that the 'number of demonstrators' indicates empowerment. The remaining four codes (police posture, societal intolerance, weather, and media attention) were maintained.

### Quantitative Measures

To assess whether grievances (i.e., perceived societal intolerance), group identification, empowerment, and perception of police aggression relate to perceived protest atmosphere, and whether the latter variable influences future action preparedness, we used five measures. Unless mentioned otherwise, these measures





Note: Percentages do not add up to a hundred, as multiple answers could be given (mean answers per person = 1.6 for LGBT demonstration and 1.3 for anti-monarchy demonstration).

$n = 136$  for LGBT demonstration.  $n = 148$  for anti-monarchy demonstration.

Fig. 2: LGBT's and anti-monarchists' self-reported explanations for their atmosphere perceptions (in %)

ranged from (1) *not at all* to (5) *very much*. On average, missing cases represented 3% for the LGBT demonstration and 5% for the anti-monarchy event.

To measure *perceived societal intolerance*, we asked participants of the LGBT demonstration: 'To what extent are you confronted with LGBT intolerance in everyday life?' Anti-monarchists were asked: 'To what extent do people in everyday life disapprove of your anti-monarchist viewpoint?' Answers ranged from '*not at all*' to '*very much*'. In addition, respondents could answer '*not relevant*', which 7% of both samples did. This latter category was excluded from our analyses.

Group identification was measured with the following question: 'To what extent do you identify with the other people present at the demonstration?'

To measure demonstrators' sense of empowerment, we asked to what extent they felt powerful, combative, and hopeful. A principal component analysis with oblique rotation (direct oblimin) revealed that these measures load on one factor, explaining 55% and 64% of the variance for the LGBT demonstration and anti-monarchy demonstration, respectively. So, we collapsed the three measures. The internal consistency of the new variable, which we call 'empowerment', proved to be sufficient for the LGBT demonstration ( $\alpha = .59$ ) and good for the anti-monarchy event ( $\alpha = .72$ ).

To assess perceived police aggression, demonstrators were asked to what extent they evaluated the behaviour of the police forces as aggressive.

Demonstrators' future action preparedness was measured with the following question: 'In the next year, to

what extent are you willing to participate in collective action against LGBT intolerance/the monarchy?'

### Observations, Interviews, and Media Reports

In the following ways, we triangulated demonstrators' atmosphere verbalizations and explanations:

The three researchers who distributed the paper-and-pencil questionnaires also observed the events. These observations were reported immediately after the events on a questionnaire, which was largely drawn from the CCC project (Klandermans et al., 2011, pp. 47–48). One of these researchers also had informal conversations with protest organizers and participants and made pictures and short videos. Besides, before the anti-monarchy event, she participated in a workshop staged by 'It is 2013!' on demonstrators' rights.

Organizers and police officers were interviewed before and after both events. For the LGBT demonstration, we interviewed four organizers, who were all members of the COC. One of the organizers was interviewed before and after the event; the three others only after the event. For the anti-monarchy demonstration, we interviewed three organizers, each representing one organization. One of the organizers was interviewed before and after the event; the other two only before the event.

Before both events, four officers of the Amsterdam police forces were interviewed by another researcher (Sprong, 2013). After the events, we interviewed two police officers. One of them had managed the policing

of both events. The other was a member of the police network 'pink in blue' and had been deployed at the LGBT demonstration as a dialogue police officer. All interviews were semi-structured and took place face to face or on the telephone. These conversations lasted between 10 and 100 minutes each. When face to face, they were taped and transcribed verbatim. When on the phone, the interviewer made notes, which were elaborated immediately afterwards.

We gathered media reports on both events, which included newspaper articles and messages on the organizers' web pages and Facebook sites.

## RESULTS

In the following two sections, we report our results of how demonstrators perceive protest atmosphere, and why they do so. As these findings are based on demonstrators' own reports, we triangulated them with other actors' atmosphere verbalizations and performed quantitative analyses. In the third section, we report regression analyses and structural equation models, which we conducted to study whether demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions influence their future action preparedness.

### How Do Demonstrators Perceive Protest Atmosphere?

Our thematic analysis revealed that demonstrators perceive protest atmosphere on a dimension of pleasure. This finding confirms our first hypothesis. Figure 1 portrays to what extent demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions diverged between and within the two events. All participants of the LGBT demonstration considered the atmosphere pleasant, to some extent. Whereas only five LGBT's (3% of the sample) thought the atmosphere was somewhat pleasant, more than two thirds (68%) considered it pleasant, and nearly one third (29%) thought it was very pleasant. At the anti-monarchy event, however, demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions were less in sync: 30% thought the atmosphere was unpleasant, 25% considered it somewhat pleasant, and 45% perceived a quite or very pleasant atmosphere. Participants of the LGBT demonstration perceived a significantly more pleasant atmosphere than participants of the anti-monarchy demonstration did (LGBT  $M = 4.25$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ; anti-monarchy  $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ;  $t(241.31) = 12.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### Triangulating Demonstrators' Atmosphere Perceptions

Also other protest actors perceived protest atmosphere on a dimension of pleasure and considered the LGBT

demonstration to be more pleasant than the anti-monarchy event.

At the LGBT demonstration, all actors perceived a pleasant atmosphere. Three of the four interviewed organizers described the atmosphere as 'a party' with 'a serious undertone'. This atmosphere perception revealed the organizers' dual goal of opposing the Russian anti-gay law (out of solidarity with Russian LGBT's) and celebrating Dutch LGBT rights. The fourth organizer described the atmosphere in terms of a collective goal: 'For the first time again the feeling that we are all in it together'. He explained: 'Of course our generation did not really learn to take the streets and fight for our rights [...] because what would we fight for?' Although this organizer did not explicitly describe the atmosphere as pleasant, we do interpret his answer as such. After all, he refers to a sense of group identification and empowerment, which are both known to induce positive affect (e.g., Drury *et al.*, 2005).

The police described the atmosphere in the same way as the three organizers did. One of the officers stressed the festiveness of this event, by saying the following: 'I have rarely seen such a festive demonstration; this was just an outdoor festival' (emphasis police officer). The event was widely portrayed in the Dutch media, which described the atmosphere as 'pleasant' ('Duizenden betogen', 2013; 'Duizenden demonstreren', 2013), 'festive' ('Feestelijke demonstratie', 2013), and 'very good' ('Grootste protest ooit', 2013). Another media outlet said the atmosphere was 'grateful', '[because LGBT's] are able to live here in a free country as the Netherlands as normally as possible' ('Poetin ga naar huis!', 2013). The researchers that observed this event all described the atmosphere as 'pleasant'. One of them added: 'people were in a festive mood, but with a clear message for the other side' (referring to Putin in the National Maritime Museum).

At the anti-monarchy demonstration, atmosphere perceptions diverged. The organizer who was interviewed after the event described the atmosphere as 'friendly', but 'too small'. This perception was shared by three other organizers whom one of the researchers had informal talks with during the demonstration. The police described the atmosphere as 'sad', as the event drew a fraction of the 1000 participants that the organizers had expected ('Republikein mag', 2013; 'Zeker individuele protesten', 2013).

The media mainly focused on the arrest of two anti-monarchists on the Dam Square (e.g., 'Twee demonstranten aangehouden', 2013). The few depictions of the rally on the Waterloo Square were short and described the atmosphere as 'tranquil' ('Plekken voor tegendemonstraties', 2013; 'Republikeinse

demonstranten', 2013; 'Locaties voor demonstraties', 2013) and 'in agony' ('Republikeinen houden zich stil', 2013), mainly owing to the low turnout. One of these media outlets added:

It is not a real demonstration in the true sense of the word, only a few are wearing something white, another wears a banner with a slogan on it, and flyers are distributed ('Plekken voor tegendemonstraties', 2013).

Two researchers that observed the event described the atmosphere as 'tranquil'; one said it was 'unenthusiastic'.

### Why Do Demonstrators Perceive a Particular Atmosphere?

Our thematic analysis revealed that participants of both events attribute their atmosphere perceptions to various environmental features (Figure 2). The features mentioned were as follows: the number of demonstrators (13% of LGBT's and 43% of anti-monarchists), music (24% resp. 20%), type of people (19% resp. 22%), other demonstrators' behaviour (21% resp. 17%), unity within the crowd (28% resp. 6%), decorations (23% resp. 2%), collective joy (19% resp. 3%), event programme (8% at both events), police posture (2% resp. 5%), societal intolerance (4% resp. 2%), weather (1% resp. 3%), and media attention (0% resp. 2%).<sup>6</sup> In the following, we explain why these environmental features relate to perceived protest atmosphere. We report our findings for the two events, which were triangulated with our observations, interview data, and media reports.

The type of people, unity within the crowd, the programme, music, decorations, the behaviour of other demonstrators, and collective joy are assessments that result from group identification. LGBT's described the type of people in positive terms (e.g., 'nice people') or as members of the LGBT community. Quite a few of these answers revealed a sense of unity within the crowd. As a respondent put it: 'We are one big family' (emphasis respondent). Demonstrators attributed this feeling to a 'shared goal', and also to the realization of a collective LGBT identity. As respondents said: 'finally—gays for 1

goal' and '[...] celebrating freedom instead of [an] anti-demonstration'. The programme (e.g., speeches by prominent members of the LGBT community), disco music (including the gay anthem 'I will survive' by Gloria Gaynor), and the proud display of rainbow decorations (e.g., flags, costumes, and balloons) engendered such an LGBT identity.

Other demonstrators were reported to engage in collective behaviours and experience collective joy. For instance, a respondent said: '[...] we shout together, we are all happy'. Demonstrators' behaviour was perceived as 'cheerful' and 'peaceful'. We believe these behaviours were in line with the LGBT community's collective identity. For instance, one of the police officers of 'pink in blue' said: 'the LGBT community is very good in parties [...] and if you see how other events are organised, they are always *very* peaceful' (emphasis police officer). So, these different environmental features suggest that participants of the LGBT demonstration identified with each other.

Anti-monarchists, to the contrary, did not identify much with other participants. For instance, demonstrators identified various social groups (e.g., 'democrats', 'liberals', 'socialists', 'veterans', and 'Anonymous') from which some clearly distanced themselves. For instance, one respondent said: 'I am against the monarchy, but now you see many of those leftist professional protesters'. Only nine demonstrators explicitly mentioned their sense of unity within the crowd. This feeling was mainly devoted to a 'shared range of ideas'. Apparently, the programme, music, and decorations did not unify the demonstrators either. That is, respondents evaluated the speeches, poetry recitals, and (alternative hard rock) music very differently. Only a minority wore something white to express their support for, as one of the organizers put it, 'less monarchy and more democracy'.

Other demonstrators were reported to engage in individual behaviours, which were described as 'friendly' and 'peaceful'. For instance, respondents said: '[...] everyone can be disturbed for a discussion' and 'everyone is relaxed, no rioters'. Several respondents mentioned the turnover at the protest, which suggests that they considered other participants to be uncommitted. Just four respondents mentioned collective joy (e.g., 'everyone is having a good time'). These behaviours point at a lack of group identification.

All in all, LGBT's seemed to identify more with other protest participants than anti-monarchists did. As these LGBT's also perceived a more pleasant atmosphere than the anti-monarchists did, we tentatively concluded that a pleasant atmosphere perception relates positively to group identification.

<sup>6</sup>A few respondents mentioned personal inclinations, such as their own attitude (2% at both events), their usage of alcohol and/or drugs (2% resp. 3%), or compared the demonstration with previous collective action on the topic (0% resp. 1%). We do not take these answers into account, as we do not consider them to be part of the protest environment.

The number of demonstrators refers to empowerment. The LGBT demonstration drew more participants than the organizers had anticipated. Possibly because of this, demonstrators thought there were 'many people'. Apparently, the large turnout engendered a sense of unity and in-group support, which are precursors of empowerment (Drury et al., 2005). As one of the demonstrators put it: 'just the solidarity with so many people'. Some referred more directly to a sense of empowerment: 'many combative people for the good cause!' (our emphasis). So, we take it that LGBT's who mentioned the turnout felt empowered.

The anti-monarchy demonstration, however, drew much less participants than the organizers had predicted. Perhaps as a result, nearly all demonstrators who mentioned the turnout thought there were 'too few people'. As a result, demonstrators felt disappointed, either in the general lack of interest or in the absence of particular individuals. In the words of a respondent: 'there is hardly anybody'. Some referred more directly to a sense of disempowerment: 'few people + probably few people who actively support the goal of democracy'. So, we gather that anti-monarchists who mentioned the turnout felt disempowered. Given that all the LGBT's perceived a pleasant atmosphere, and most of the anti-monarchists (84%) did not, we provisionally deduced that a pleasant atmosphere perception relates positively to empowerment.

Demonstrators also devoted their atmosphere perceptions to the police posture, societal intolerance, the weather, and media attention for the event. However, these features seemed to play a minor role, given that they were only mentioned by a small minority (7% of LGBT's and 12% of anti-monarchists), and often in combination with features pertaining to group identification and/or empowerment. So, we only report the two features that we expected to relate to perceived protest atmosphere: the police posture and grievances (i.e., societal intolerance).

The three participants of the LGBT demonstration who mentioned the police posture considered it non-aggressive. For instance, one respondent said there were 'few police [officers]' present. At the anti-monarchy demonstration, however, six out of seven respondents who mentioned the police thought they were somewhat aggressive. As one of the respondents said: 'checked five times, escorted twice, once [brought] to the [police] station [...]'. The anti-monarchists' lack of trust in the police had already become apparent during a pre-event workshop when they discussed the possibility of being arrested. Besides, during the event, five demonstrators spontaneously mentioned the

massive police surveillance (e.g., 'it is crawling with undercover officers here'). Given that the three LGBT's perceived a pleasant atmosphere and five out of seven anti-monarchists did not, we tentatively deduced that a demonstrator's perception of a pleasant protest atmosphere relates negatively to his or her perception of police aggression.

*Societal intolerance* was considered low by the six LGBT's who mentioned this feature. These demonstrators' awareness that they did not share Russian LGBT's plight generated a sense of gratitude and pride. As one respondent said: 'The people, the music, colourful, multi-faceted and *that is* allowed in the Netherlands' (our emphasis). The three anti-monarchists who mentioned this feature did not feel tolerated by Dutch society. One respondent even thought that societal intolerance further increased: '[...] Different atmosphere, since the coronation'. As none of the LGBT's and anti-monarchists perceived an unpleasant atmosphere, we could not draw any tentative conclusion about the relationship between perceived protest atmosphere and perceived societal intolerance.

#### Descriptive Statistics And Correlational Analyses

To verify whether a demonstrator's perception of pleasant protest atmosphere relates to his or her perception of societal intolerance, group identification, empowerment, and his or her perception of police aggression, like we hypothesized, and our thematic analyses suggested, we assessed descriptive statistics for both events and performed correlational analyses. For these analyses, we used our atmosphere scale and the variables perceived societal intolerance, group identification, empowerment, and perceived police aggression.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics. LGBT's, who perceived a significantly more pleasant atmosphere than anti-monarchists did, considered Dutch society significantly less intolerant, identified significantly more with other participants, felt significantly more empowered, and thought the police were significantly less aggressive. So, these findings suggest that perceived protest atmosphere relates positively to group identification and empowerment, and negatively to perceived societal intolerance and perceived police aggression.

These relationships are only partially confirmed by our correlational analyses (Table 2). At the LGBT demonstration, perceived protest atmosphere does not relate to any of the variables. We explain this finding by the fact that there is hardly any variation: All LGBT's perceived a pleasant atmosphere. At the anti-monarchy demonstration, however, perceived protest atmosphere



**Table 1.** LGBT's and anti-monarchists' perceived protest atmosphere, perceived societal intolerance, group identification, empowerment, and perceived police aggression: means and standard deviations

	N		Mean		SD	
	LGBT	Anti-monarchy	LGBT	Anti-monarchy	LGBT	Anti-monarchy
Perceived protest atmosphere	153	166	4.25***	3.13	0.51	1.06
Perceived societal intolerance	152	172	2.44	2.87**	1.12	1.28
Group identification	163	186	4.11***	3.22	0.87	1.15
Empowerment	164	180	3.83***	3.20	0.80	1.01
Perceived police aggression	158	166	1.28	1.86***	0.64	1.11

Note: Independent samples *t*-tests indicated that the means differ significantly between the two protests at  $p < .01$  (\*\*) or  $p < .001$  (\*\*\*).

**Table 2.** Correlations between perceived protest atmosphere, perceived societal intolerance, group identification, empowerment, and perceived police aggression for LGBT's (above the diagonal) and anti-monarchists (below the diagonal in bold)

	Perceived protest atmosphere	Perceived societal intolerance	Group identification	Empowerment	Perceived police aggression
Perceived protest atmosphere	–	–.003	.07	.13	–.01
Perceived societal intolerance	<b>.23**</b>	–	.19*	.04	.02
Group identification	<b>.36***</b>	<b>.20*</b>	–	<b>.32***</b>	.04
Empowerment	<b>.39***</b>	<b>.15<sup>†</sup></b>	<b>.59***</b>	–	–.09
Perceived police aggression	<b>–.03</b>	<b>.03</b>	<b>.10</b>	<b>.13<sup>†</sup></b>	–

Note: Here and in Table 3, and Figures 3 and 4, we use standardized variables. Here, and in Table 3, missing cases are excluded pairwise.

$n \geq 152$  for LGBT demonstration.  $n \geq 166$  for anti-monarchy demonstration.

<sup>†</sup> $p < .1$ ;

\* $p < .05$ ;

\*\* $p < .01$ ;

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

relates positively to perceived societal intolerance, group identification, and empowerment. We find no relationship between perceived protest atmosphere and perceived police aggression.

The first three findings for the anti-monarchy demonstration confirm our hypotheses, but the latter finding does not. Upon reflection, however, it makes sense that we do not find a relationship between perceived protest atmosphere and perceived police aggression. After all, anti-monarchists' perceptions of police aggression hardly varied: 79% thought the police did not behave aggressively, 10% perceived some aggression, and 11% considered the police to be aggressive.

## In Sum

With thematic analyses, descriptive statistics, and correlational analyses, we assessed whether a demonstrator's perception of a pleasant protest atmosphere relates positively to his or her perception of societal intolerance, group identification, and empowerment, and negatively to his or her perception of police aggression, as we

hypothesized (H2–5). Our results suggested that we can partially accept our second hypothesis. After all, only for anti-monarchists, perceived protest atmosphere proved to be (positively) related to perceived societal intolerance. Further, we accept our third and fourth hypotheses. This is because the results indicated consistently (with the exception of the correlational analyses for the LGBT demonstration) that perceived protest atmosphere relates positively to group identification and empowerment. Last, we reject our fifth hypothesis. Although our thematic analysis and descriptive statistics suggested that perceived protest atmosphere relates negatively to perceived police aggression, our correlational analyses indicated that the variables are not related at either event.

## Protest Atmosphere and Future Action

Does a demonstrator's perception of a pleasant protest atmosphere stimulate his or her future action preparedness? And, if so, is this effect confounded by perceived

societal intolerance and mediated by group identification, empowerment, and perceived police aggression?

As our previous analyses indicated that perceived protest atmosphere does not relate to perceived police aggression, we have to reject our hypothesis that perceived police aggression mediates the effect of perceived protest atmosphere on future action preparedness (H7d). To test the remaining hypotheses, we first performed a hierarchical regression analysis for both events, which consisted of two models. In the first model, we tested whether perceived protest atmosphere influences future action preparedness. In the second model, we also included the measures perceived societal intolerance, group identification, and empowerment.

Table 3 lists the results. In Model 1, perceived protest atmosphere does not influence demonstrators' future action preparedness for either event. However, when we also include perceived societal intolerance, group identification, and empowerment in our analyses (Model 2), perceived protest atmosphere *does* influence future action preparedness for the anti-monarchists. For LGBT's, the effect of perceived protest atmosphere on future action preparedness remains insignificant, presumably because of the lack of variation in LGBT's atmosphere perceptions. Interestingly, at both events, the effect of perceived protest atmosphere on future action preparedness turns from positive (Model 1) to negative (Model 2). This finding suggests that at both events, the effect of perceived protest atmosphere on future action preparedness is suppressed by perceived societal intolerance, group identification, and/or empowerment.

**Table 3.** Predicting LGBT's and anti-monarchists' future action preparedness: regression analyses (ordinary least squares)

	LGBT		Anti-monarchy	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Perceived protest atmosphere	.01	-.03	.11	-.18*
Perceived societal intolerance		.14 <sup>†</sup>		.20**
Group identification		.32***		.38***
Empowerment		.16*		.27**
R <sup>2</sup>	.00	.20	.01	.34

Note: Here, and in Figures 3 and 4, reported coefficients are standardized ( $\beta$ ).  $n \geq 152$  for LGBT demonstration.  $n \geq 166$  for anti-monarchy demonstration.

<sup>†</sup> $p < .1$ ;

\* $p < .05$ ;

\*\* $p < .01$ ;

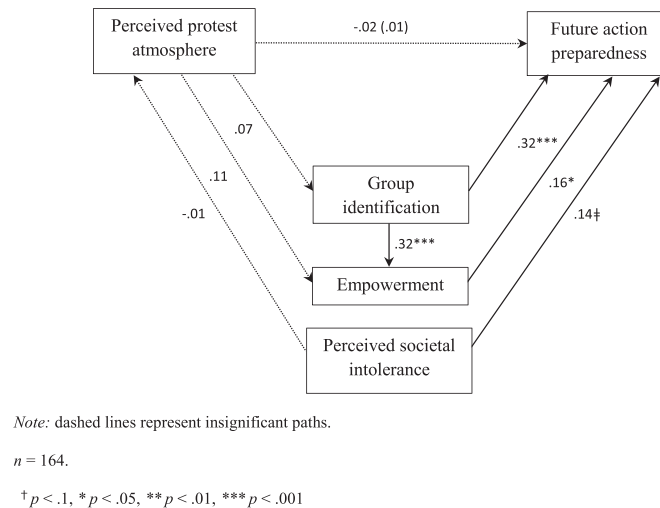
\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

To verify this assumption, we performed a structural equation model for both events. In line with our hypotheses (H7a,b,c), we included perceived societal intolerance as a confounding variable, and group identification and empowerment as mediating variables. As group identification is known to influence empowerment (Drury et al., 2005), we also took this path into account.

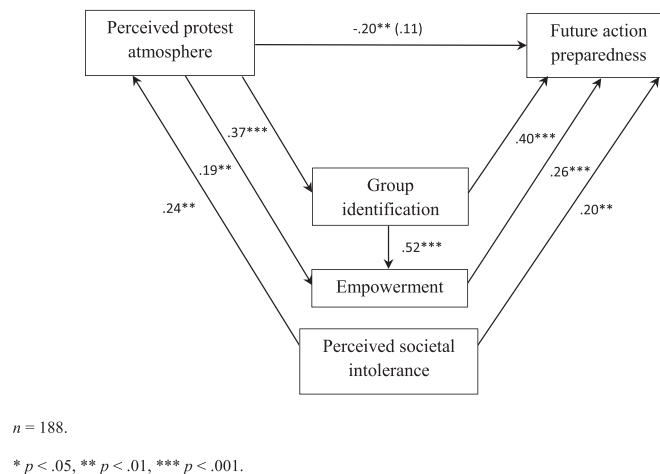
Figures 3 and 4 portray our model for the LGBT demonstration and anti-monarchy event, respectively. For both events, the model fits our data well. The chi-square value is insignificant (LGBT  $\chi^2(2; 164) = 5.71$ ,  $p = .06$ ; anti-monarchy  $\chi^2(2; 188) = 2.57$ ,  $p = .28$ ). Also, other fit indices indicate a sufficient fit for the LGBT demonstration (comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.92, normed fit index (NFI) = 0.91, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.11) and a very good fit for the anti-monarchy demonstration (CFI = 1.00, NFI = 0.99, and RMSEA = 0.04). Further, the squared multiple correlation ( $R^2$ ) of future action preparedness is .18 for the LGBT's and .33 for the anti-monarchists.

The results reveal that group identification and empowerment suppress the effect of perceived protest atmosphere on future action preparedness (although this effect is only significant for anti-monarchists). This is because demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions deter their future action preparedness (LGBT  $\beta = -.02$ ; anti-monarchy  $\beta = -.20$ ) and also *stimulate* their sense of group identification and empowerment, which, in turn, *stimulate* their action preparedness (total indirect effect: LGBT  $\beta = .04$ ; anti-monarchy  $\beta = .25$ ). In addition, for anti-monarchists, perceived societal intolerance stimulates both perceived protest atmosphere ( $\beta = .24$ ) and demonstrator's future action preparedness ( $\beta = .20$ ). So, at this demonstration, perceived societal intolerance also suppresses the effect of perceived protest atmosphere on future action preparedness. These findings explain why our first regression analyses indicated that demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions do not influence their future action preparedness: the negative direct effect and positive indirect effects (plus, for anti-monarchists, the positive confounding effect) cancel each other out (MacKinnon et al., 2000).

So, we reject our hypotheses that a demonstrator's perception of a pleasant protest atmosphere stimulates his or her future action preparedness (H6), and that this effect is confounded by perceived societal intolerance (H7a), and mediated by group identification and empowerment (H7b,c). In fact, a pleasant atmosphere perception deters a demonstrator's future action preparedness (only significantly for anti-monarchists), and this effect is suppressed by perceived societal intolerance, group identification, and empowerment (only for anti-monarchists).



**Fig. 3:** Predicting LGBT's future action preparedness: structural equation model



**Fig. 4:** Predicting anti-monarchists' future action preparedness: structural equation model

The latter findings seem contradictory to current theorizing on demonstrators' protest experiences, but we think they make perfect sense. People do not merely protest to enjoy themselves, but to voice a particular grievance (e.g., Collins, 2001). So, the more demonstrators consider the protest atmosphere to be pleasant, the more they feel related to other participants and empowered (which promotes their future action preparedness), but the less they feel that the protest serves a political purpose (which deters their future action preparedness).

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this paper, we studied how demonstrators perceive protest atmosphere, why they do so, and whether

demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions influence their future action preparedness. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first attempt to understand demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions (but see van Leeuwen et al., 2015). Therefore, we first conceptualized 'perceived protest atmosphere' as the affective state that the protest environment induces. Based on environmental psychology and collective action research, we hypothesized that demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions diverge on a dimension of pleasure, and relate to their grievance (here: perceived societal intolerance), group identification, empowerment, and perceived police aggression. In turn, a demonstrator's perception of a pleasant protest atmosphere was expected to stimulate his or her future action preparedness. This effect, was, however, assumed to be

confounded by perceived societal intolerance and mediated by group identification, empowerment, and perceived police aggression. To test these hypotheses, we analysed a mixed-methods dataset of two protest events, which were staged by LGBT's and anti-monarchists. These events were selected as we expected them to differ substantially in atmosphere, and, thus, demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions.

A thematic analysis of demonstrators' own atmosphere verbalizations revealed that perceived protest atmosphere diverges on a dimension of pleasure, just as we expected. This finding was supported by the atmosphere verbalizations of other protest actors. Thematic analyses of demonstrators' atmosphere explanations, as well as descriptive statistics and correlational analyses, revealed that a pleasant atmosphere perception relates positively to group identification and empowerment. These findings confirm our hypotheses. Partially confirming our assumption, we found that anti-monarchists' perceptions of a pleasant protest atmosphere relate positively to their perception of societal intolerance; for LGBT's, these variables are unrelated. Contrary to our expectation, demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions do not relate to their perception of police aggression at either event (see succeeding discussion).

Also not as expected, we found that a pleasant atmosphere perception deters a demonstrator's future action preparedness (only significantly for anti-monarchists) and also stimulates his or her sense of group identification and empowerment, which, in turn, stimulate his or her future action preparedness (only for anti-monarchists). Besides, at the anti-monarchy demonstration, a demonstrator's perception of societal intolerance proved to stimulate both his or her perception of a pleasant protest atmosphere and his or her future action preparedness. So, in statistical terms, perceived protest atmosphere has a negative direct effect on future action preparedness, which is suppressed by its positive indirect effect (via group identification and empowerment), and by the positive confounding effect of perceived societal intolerance. These findings indicate that demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions are part of a complex motivational constellation that brings people back to the streets and should not be studied independently from the variables that are known to play a role (i.e., grievances, group identification, and empowerment). After all, when we merely study the effect of demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions on their future action preparedness, we fail to detect it.

Our findings largely support collective action research. Previous studies revealed that demonstrators

generally enjoy their protest participation, because they share a grievance, identify with other protest participants, and feel empowered (e.g., Britt & Heise, 2000; Drury *et al.*, 2005; Wood, 2001). This is also what we find. Grievances, group identification, and empowerment are also known to stimulate demonstrators' (intended) future collective action participation (e.g., Drury *et al.*, 2005; Klandermans *et al.*, 2002; Wood, 2001). Our results indicate the same.

Contrary to research by Drury and colleagues (2005; also see Drury & Reicher, 2005; Reicher, 1996), we do not find a relationship between demonstrators' affective state and their perception of police aggression, nor between the latter variable and future action preparedness. We think this is due to the fact that our samples hardly vary in perceived police aggression: 96% of the LGBT's and 79% of the anti-monarchists did not think the police behaved aggressively. So, future research should verify our findings with protests where the police and demonstrators clash.

What this study adds to current research is a better understanding of the affective side of protest participation. The few extant studies on the topic indicated that protest participation generally induces positive affect (e.g., Collins, 2001; Jasper, 1997; Neville & Reicher, 2011). Our study nuances this finding: Demonstrators evaluate their protest environment on a dimension of pleasure, which means that they can also experience displeasure. This has rarely been argued. We think this is because research on the topic typically focused on so-called collective emotions (e.g., Collins, 2001; Jasper, 2014), that is to say, 'common feelings by members of a social unit as a result of shared experiences' (Lawler, Thye, & Yoon, 2014, p. 191), which are known to be more positive than individually felt affect (Collins, 2001). After all, the few studies that focused on unpleasant protest experiences indicated that they relate to demonstrators' sense of *disunity* and *disempowerment* (Drury & Reicher, 2005; Drury *et al.*, 2005).

Another relevant aspect of this study is that it shows that demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions influence their future action preparedness. We believe this finding furthers our knowledge of sustained participation, which we know relatively little about (Klandermans, 1997; Louis, 2009). This insight will be of special interest to protest organizers. To promote sustained participation, they should organize protests that are entertaining and also have a clear political aim. We think such 'serious enjoyment' can be achieved by making demonstrators conscious of their collective identity and providing opportunities to celebrate this identity. Consciousness may, for instance, be engendered by movement



framing: clearly identifying what the group's collective grievances are and who is to blame (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). To celebrate a collective identity, organizers may create or deploy empowering speeches, movement anthems, and symbols such as the LGBT movements' rainbow flag (Blake, 2014; Casquete, 2006; Stryker, Owens, & White, 2000).

Overall, we believe this research provides valuable new insights for collective action scholars and organizations. Yet, our research design is not without flaws. First of all, we only studied demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions at two protests. Although we believe that our research design is strong, because participants of the two events perceived the protest atmosphere very differently, we cannot maintain that our findings are conclusive. For instance, at protests where police–demonstrator interactions are conflictual, perceived police aggression might well relate to demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions (van Leeuwen et al., 2015) and influence their future action preparedness. So, future research should study demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions with a larger variety of protest events.

A second limitation is that our data are correlational. This means that we cannot be sure whether demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions really influence their participation in future collective action. Although our findings align with the theorizing by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), Collins (2001), and Wood (2001), they should be verified by a future panel study.

Notwithstanding these limitations, we believe that our research provides a valid portrayal of demonstrators' perceptions of protest atmosphere, and how these shape their future action preparedness. We hope this research will persuade other social movement scholars to pay more attention to the affective side of protest participation and to perceived protest atmosphere, specifically. For instance, we think that it would be very interesting to explore whether arousal constitutes another dimension of demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions, as Mehrabian and Russell (1974) suggested. It would also be interesting to verify to what extent demonstrators' atmosphere perceptions change during the course of an event, for instance, because of the behaviour of the police or the presence of counterdemonstrators. Scholars could assess whether atmosphere perceptions influence other types of behaviour as well, such as the time demonstrators spend at a protest, and their willingness to become a member of the social movement organization or to donate money to it. Last, we think it would be relevant to study protest atmosphere from the perspective of other protest actors, such as police officers and media

reporters. After all, the atmosphere perceptions of these actors are likely to influence the way a protest is managed or portrayed, factors that are known to independently influence protest mobilization.

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